

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN PATRIOTIC POEMS BY PAUL CELAN AND USMAN AWANG

(Kajian Perbandingan Bahasa Figuratif dalam Puisi Patriotik Karya Paul Celan dan Usman Awang)

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To cite this article (*Rujukan makalah ini*): Izzatul Elisya Rosli & Farhana Muslim Mohd Jalis (2025). A comparative study of figurative language in patriotic poems by Paul Celan and Usman Awang. *Malay Literature*, 38(2), 251–270 [https://doi.org/10.37052/ml38\(2\)no4](https://doi.org/10.37052/ml38(2)no4)

Received: Peroleh:	11/9/2025	Revised: Semakan:	9/12/2025	Accepted: Terima:	23/12/2025	Published online: Terbit dalam talian:	31/12/2025
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Makalah ini telah melalui proses penilaian sulit berganda (*This article has undergone a double blind peer-review process*)

Abstract

This study aims to compare and analyse figurative language in patriotic poems by Paul Celan and Usman Awang. The objectives of the study are to discern the different types of figurative language used in these poems and, through analysis and comparison, to examine the similarities and differences in application by the two poets. The study examines how figurative communication is employed across different linguistic and cultural media to produce meaning and evoke emotional impact. This study employs Perrine's (1977) theory of figurative language to determine the types of figurative expressions and to compare the poets' use of figurative language. The analysis focuses on three German poems, "*Schwarze Flocken*," "*Todesfuge*," and "*Psalm*," and three

Malay poems, “*Damai*,” “*Tanahair*,” and “*Pahlawan Kemerdekaan*.” The analysis shows that Paul Celan’s poems contain personification, metaphors, irony, symbols, similes, hyperbole, understatement, and synecdoche. Conversely, Usman Awang’s Malay poems employ personification, metaphors, irony, symbols, apostrophe, metonymy, hyperbole, synecdoche, and paradox. The findings indicate that Paul Celan’s patriotic poems predominantly employed metaphors and symbols to illustrate the horror of the Holocaust, whereas Usman Awang’s poems employ personification and hyperbole to portray the people’s fighting desire for independence.

Keywords: figurative language, patriotism, comparative literary analysis, poetry, Paul Celan, Usman Awang

Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan membandingkan dan menganalisis bahasa figuratif dalam puisi-puisi patriotik karya Paul Celan dan Usman Awang. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan jenis-jenis bahasa figuratif yang digunakan dalam puisi-puisi tersebut serta, menerusi analisis dan perbandingan, mengenal pasti persamaan dan perbezaan dalam penggunaannya oleh kedua-dua pemuisi. Kajian ini juga bertujuan memahami dengan lebih mendalam bagaimana komunikasi figuratif digunakan melalui wadah linguistik dan budaya yang berbeza bagi menghasilkan makna serta membangkitkan impak emosi. Kajian ini menggunakan Teori Bahasa Figuratif oleh Perrine (1977) untuk menentukan jenis-jenis ekspresi figuratif bagi membandingkan dan membezakan penggunaan bahasa figuratif antara kedua-dua pemuisi. Metodologi kajian ini melibatkan analisis terhadap tiga buah puisi Jerman, iaitu “Schwarze Flocken,” “Todesfuge,” dan “Psalm,” dan tiga buah puisi Melayu, iaitu “Damai,” “Tanahair,” dan “Pahlawan Kemerdekaan.” Analisis menunjukkan bahawa puisi-puisi Paul Celan mengandungi unsur personifikasi, metafora, ironi, simbol, simile (perumpamaan), hiperbola, kenyataan yang kurang benar (understatement) dan sinekdoke. Sebaliknya, puisi-puisi Melayu karya Usman Awang menggunakan teknik personifikasi, metafora, ironi, simbol, apostrof (koma atas), metonimi, hiperbola, sinekdoke dan paradoks. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa puisi-puisi patriotik karya Paul Celan banyak menggunakan metafora dan simbol untuk menggambarkan kengerian peristiwa Holocaust, manakala puisi-puisi Usman Awang pula menggunakan personifikasi dan hiperbola untuk menggambarkan hasrat juang rakyat bagi meraih kemerdekaan.

Kata kunci: bahasa figuratif, patriotisme, analisis sastera perbandingan, puisi, Paul Celan, Usman Awang

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a literary form characterised by a harmonious interplay of sound and meaning. It may be described as a mode of expression that conveys messages with greater emotional force than ordinary language (Syafitri & Marlinton, 2018). According to Leggo (2018), poetry has historically functioned as a tool for preserving cultural heritage and documenting historical facts. Poems encapsulate irreplaceable knowledge about particular eras, cultures, and worldviews. They also allow individuals to express emotions creatively, serving as an avenue through which both readers and poets can understand and navigate complex emotions (Paiva, 2020).

Since poems often carry dense layers of meaning, literal language alone is insufficient to convey the nuanced emotional experiences. As such, poets rely on figurative language in the composition of their poems to articulate their emotions more vividly and effectively (Marseventianti, 2020). Hidayah and Purba (2021) note that figurative language has the ability to expand both the aesthetic impact and potency of a communication through the expression of ideas through non-verbal phrases, typically in a form of symbolic or metaphorical constructs. This technique provides readers with a heightened sense of understanding of the material, in addition to the persuasiveness and emotional intensity within a text. Hyperbole, metaphor, and other figurative devices enable poets to emphasise intricate emotions and heighten the impact of their creative work. In relation to cultural and historical contexts, Mangilow and Silverman (2019) observe that writers in Germany have composed patriotic poems as testimonies to past atrocities, such as the brutality of the Holocaust. In contrast, Malaysian patriotic poems emerged as a means to foster unity among a multiracial society following independence (Shazlin, 2020).

Poetry often employs challenging vocabulary and indirect expressions, which may complicate interpretation. These difficulties arise because readers may struggle to interpret figurative language and to construct meanings that align with the poet's intention (Hasanah, 2018). Both Malay and German poetry are shaped by their respective cultural and historical environments, resulting in distinctive compositional styles and literary conventions. Although comparative studies between German and Malay poetry may appear niche, they present rich opportunities for research in translation studies and comparative literature.

Efforts to translate Malay poetry into German have existed since the nineteenth century, and contemporary initiatives by organizations such

as the Goethe-Institut to support the translation and circulation of Malay literary works (Graf, 2007; Holzwarth *et al.*, 2012). These initiatives include German translations of works by prominent Malay poets such as Muhammad Haji Salleh, Latiff Mohidin, A. Samad Said, and Faisal Tehrani into translation anthologies to facilitate linguistic and aesthetic access for German readers (Quayum, 2006; Holzwarth *et al.*, 2012; Rath, 2014; Salleh, 2015). Such efforts highlight the importance of cultural exchange and demonstrate how literary comparison fosters mutual appreciation of artistic and cultural values.

German and Malay poems exhibit distinct stylistic attributes. According to Yashchuk (2018), German figurative language is shaped by associative reinterpretations of direct, indirect, and connotative meanings that reflect their social functions. In comparison, Malay poems are renowned for their subtlety, politeness, and culturally grounded expressions (Hussain *et al.*, 2021). Although numerous studies have analysed German or Malay poetry individually, a noticeable gap remains in the literature, indicating a need for systematic comparative research conducted on German and Malay poetic forms, specifically on figurative language.

This study aims to address this gap by examining points of convergence and divergence in German and Malay patriotic poems. Comparative analysis is essential for understanding the stylistic meanings conveyed across linguistic and cultural frameworks. Accordingly, this study analyses figurative language in selected German and Malay patriotic poems to identify figurative expressions employed and to explore how these devices convey meaning and emotion across different linguistic traditions.

This study is guided by the following study questions:

1. What types of figurative language are used in patriotic poems by Paul Celan and Usman Awang?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the use of figurative language in patriotic poems by Paul Celan and Usman Awang?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Figurative Language by Lawrence Perrine (1977)

Figurative language has attracted scholarly attention across various linguistic contexts. In linguistics, for instance, research on figurative language has garnered attention due to its importance in understanding the process of language processing and communication (Kabra *et al.*, 2023). According to Perrine (1977), there are twelve types of figurative language, which include irony, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy,

symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and simile. Lawrence Perrine's theory of figurative language has been widely adopted in figurative language studies as an analytical tool in literary studies due to its clear categorisation, operational clarity, and long-standing acceptance in literary and stylistic research. The theory offers systematic definitions of major figures of speech while emphasising their interpretative functions in shaping meaning, imagery, and thematic development. Its adaptability across genres and cultural contexts has led many scholars to employ Perrine's model to ensure consistency and comparability, particularly in cross-cultural poetry studies or qualitative textual analysis.

Several studies have applied Perrine's framework to texts beyond traditional poetry. For instance, analyses of song lyrics illustrate how figurative vary across textual forms, enriching the understanding of Perrine's categories. Nainggolan *et al.* (2021) examined the figurative language used in Joe Biden's speech and found that metaphor was the most dominant device, accounting for 46.15% of the figurative expressions identified. This dominance highlights how speakers strategically rely on metaphor to clarify abstract concepts and construct persuasive imagery for audiences.

Although Perrine's theory (1977) has been used to analyse numerous types of texts and languages, research applying this framework specifically to German and Malay poetry remains limited. This study, therefore, aims to address this research gap by applying Perrine's (1977) theory to analyse figurative language in selected German and Malay patriotic poems.

Figurative Language in Poetry

Figurative language plays a crucial role in poetry as it allows poets to express abstract ideas through creative uses of language. Metaphor, in particular, is a highly creative linguistic tool that establishes relationships between two seemingly unrelated concepts by attributing characteristics of one entity to another. This, as explained by Salehan *et al.* (2018:18), helps individuals to recast and re-interpret perceived ideas and enhance the imaginative dimension of poetic expression.

Various scholars have articulated their own perspectives on the significance of figurative language. According to Anggiamurni (2020), figurative language strengthens literary writing by making it more expressive and meaningful, often through aesthetically appealing word choices that attract readers. In this sense, figurative language describes objects or ideas in ways that differ from direct, literal expression. Similarly, Wulandari (2015) describes figurative language as a stylistic device that poets use to convey emotions in an indirect yet intensified manner, creating

a stronger effect than literal statements alone. Sonia (2020) also highlights that figurative expressions communicate meaning implicitly, encouraging readers to interpret underlying messages through inference.

The usage of figurative language is therefore significant not only because it stimulates the readers' pleasure of being able to use their imagination while trying to understand the meaning, but also, as stated by Wulandri (2015), it enhances emotional intensity and conveys the poet's attitude along with the information, rather than reading it normally. As Carston (2018) notes, figurative language amplifies meaning and contributes to the cognitive and pragmatic effects of interpretation.

Poetry as a Literary Form

Poetry, as a literary form, often carries an ideological meaning function to promote and reinforce dominant and authoritarian perspectives. Many poems convey religious and moral values, patriotic sentiments, and other themes that support the construction of a grand narrative. In contrast, poetry with an agentive character presents alternative ways of thinking and being (Shah *et al.*, 2024).

According to Sonia (2020), poetry is a literary genre that is made up of rhythm and typography. The function of the rhythm is to provide strong emotion to the readers while reading, unlike ordinary speech. Typography, however, refers to the form of a poem, including its arrangement into lines and stanzas. Two features that differentiate poetry from other literary forms are its density of expression and its aesthetic corridor—qualities that allow poets to condense meaning and employ language in highly stylised ways.

Rejeki, Yulianti, and Kustantinah (2022) explain that poetry is a form of literary expression characterised by diverse techniques and stylistic choices. It is a medium of expressing emotions, thoughts, and ideas through the utilisation of rhythm, imagery, and carefully crafted language. For centuries, poetry has played a significant cultural role as a medium for expressing suggestions, information, opinions, and feelings, but in words that can provide a greater impact on one's emotions since poetry is made up of figurative language.

Previous Studies on Figurative Language in Poetry

Poetry analysis involves examining the elements of a poem to understand how meaning is constructed. To compare the use of figurative language, for example, in German and Malay poems, it is necessary to review prior studies that have investigated figurative devices in various poetic traditions.

Based on the previous studies, numerous scholars have analysed figurative language across different poets, genres, and languages. Syafitri and Marlinton (2018), for example, examined figurative language in a poem by Edgar Allan Poe and identified several forms, including personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, metonymy, and symbol.

Similarly, Heda and Bram (2021), using a descriptive qualitative method, analysed figurative expressions in five poems by Rupi Kaur and found that personification, simile, hyperbole, and metaphor were the most frequently occurring types. Another study by Khairunisa, Dirgeyasa, and Putri (2020) explored figurative language in Amir Hamzah's poems using a random sampling technique, and the result showed that simile was the most dominant device used in the poet's writing.

Hamid (2014) further examines the use of figurative language in the poetic works of Singaporean and Malaysian writers, specifically Masuri S. N. and A. Samad Said. His study highlights the close relationship between diction and figurative language, noting that poets intentionally select expressions that enhance the aesthetic appeal of their poems, amplify their impact, and convey specific connotations. Through deliberate word choice and figurative expression, poets can create poems that are not only stylistically appealing but also rich in layered meaning.

While these studies provide valuable insights, they focus on poems from different languages, periods, and authors, and do not conduct comparisons across linguistic traditions. None of the existing research examines figurative language in German and Malay poems side by side. Therefore, a comparative analysis of figurative language in German and Malay patriotic poems is needed to fill this gap in the literature.

Previous Studies on Paul Celan's Poems

Paul Celan is known for his Holocaust-themed poems, and numerous studies have examined his works. Torres-Martinez (2019), for instance, conducted a study using a semiotic translation method to analyse two of Paul Celan's poems, "*Schwarze Flocken*" and "*Weggebeizt*". The study suggests that the experience of the Holocaust served as the driving force behind Celan's poetic works. It also reveals the process of translating Celan's poetry and emphasises the emotional depth conveyed in his writing.

In contrast, Nagle (2023) analysed Paul Celan's poems using a descriptive method to capture the mood and emotional impact of his works. The study found that the poet used surrealistic elements to address the horrors of the Holocaust and to evoke the need for understanding and remembrance. For

example, the imagery of prisoners walking towards gas chambers along paths lined with flowers in “*Aschenblume*” creates a haunting symbol. Despite the valuable insights offered by these studies, most existing research focuses primarily on interpreting the meaning of Celan’s poems. As a result, there remains a lack of recent studies that systematically analyse the figurative language employed in Paul Celan’s poetry.

Previous Studies on Usman Awang’s Poems

Amini *et al.* (2021) conducted a study that examined the process of explicitation in the translation of Usman Awang’s poem “*Sahabatku*” from Malay to English. The study involved analysing the translated poem to identify instances where additional explanation was required to make implicit meanings explicit in the target language. The findings revealed that Usman Awang’s writing style consistently incorporates social and political values as well as cultural context.

Similarly, Mokhtar *et al.* (2021) employed Sperber and Wilson’s (1986) relevance theory to examine the moral values expressed in Usman Awang’s poem “*Ke Makam Bonda*” in terms of linguistic and structural perspectives. This theoretical framework enabled the researchers to infer meaning without relying on a sentence-by-sentence analysis, instead focusing on the implied meanings conveyed in each section of the poem. The study identified several moral values communicated by the poet, including sacrifice, self-reflection, teamwork, and Islamic values. It also identified various types of figurative language, such as personification, metaphor, and hyperbole, to depict the theme of a mother’s sacrifice for her children.

Although both studies mentioned above focus on poems by Usman Awang, their primary emphasis is placed on translation strategies and moral interpretation. As such, there remains a need for further research that specifically investigates the application of figurative language in Usman Awang’s poetry. A more in-depth analysis of figurative language would contribute to a clearer understanding of the poet’s stylistic choices, particularly when his works are compared with poems from other linguistic and cultural traditions.

METHODOLOGY

Background of the Poetry Writers

Paul Celan (1920-1970) was a Romanian-born poet and translator who wrote primarily in German and is widely regarded as one of the most influential voices of the post-Holocaust generation of poetry. Celan’s works

were profoundly shaped by his personal experiences as a Jewish Holocaust survivor, including the loss of his parents to Nazi death camps. Celan's poetic style is characterized by condensed language, dense imagery, and the frequent employment of metaphors and symbols, which serve to articulate trauma, suffering, and the perceived inadequacy of language in the aftermath of genocide (Meyerhofer, 1981).

In contrast, Usman Awang (1929-2001) was one of Malaysia's most influential poets, playwrights, and journalists. He is widely known as "*Penyajak Rakyat*" (the People's Poet) in recognition of his lifelong commitment to social justice and advocacy for the underprivileged. His poetic works predominantly address themes of nationalism, colonial resistance, and the struggle for independence, with strong emphasis on unity, patriotism, and love for the nation. Usman Awang's poetry relies extensively on figurative language to animate nature, history, and national figures, closely intertwining poetic expression with Malaysia's socio-political context (Sarawak Tribune, 2021; Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2025).

The Theory of Figurative Language

The theory of figurative language was developed by Lawrence Perrine in 1977. According to Perrine (1977), figurative language can be systematically identified through twelve categories: irony, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and simile, as illustrated in Figure 1.

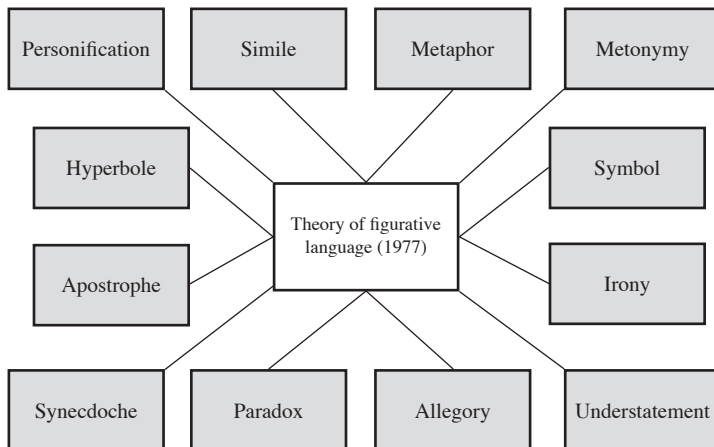


Figure 1 The theory of figurative language by Perrine (1997).

Research Design

The selected samples in this study consist of poems authored by Paul Celan and Usman Awang that are themed around patriotism and obtained from online sources. Within these samples, elements of figurative language are categorised according to Perrine's (1997) theory. The data extracted from the poems were then presented in a table. A contrastive analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences in the use of figurative language across the poems, as well as to compare how figurative language functions within different linguistic contexts. A detailed analysis of the data is then conducted to identify any notable patterns or trends emerging from this study.

Data of the Study

The dataset used in this research consists of three poetic works by each of the two selected poets, all of which are thematically related to patriotism. The three poems by Paul Celan include "*Schwarze Flocken*" (1944; Black Flakes), "*Todesfuge*" (Death Fugue), written in 1948, but published after World War II in "*Gedichte*" (1951), and later in English in 1959 with minor revisions, as well as "*Psalm*" (1962). The three poems by Usman Awang include "*Damai*" (1955; Peace), "*Tanahair*" (1956; Homeland), and "*Pahlawan Kemerdekaan*" (1995; Independence Warrior). These poems were deliberately selected because they reflect pivotal historical events that shaped each nation's sense of identity and national pride. Within the German context, these poems focus on the Holocaust, an era marked by extreme persecution and pain, emphasising the need to be reminded of history and the act of resistance against oppression during World War II (Greenfeld *et al.*, 2021). The above-mentioned poems illustrate patriotism, not in the sense of nationalism, but as a belief in human dignity and collective remembrance. In contrast, the Malay poems address Malaysia's national aspiration for independence, highlighting themes of national determination, unity, and resilience in the pursuit of self-rule. Through these poems, patriotism emerges as love for the nation and collective efforts to achieve freedom and justice.

By selecting poems that engage with such formative historical experiences, this study examines how poets from different cultural backgrounds employ poetic language in formulating and expressing patriotic sentiments, making it possible to comparatively analyse the theme of patriotism in German and Malay literature (Chin & Quayum, 2021).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

An analysis of three poems by Paul Celan, namely “*Schwarze Flocken*,” “*Todesfuge*,” and “*Psalm*,” reveals a total of twenty instances of figurative language encompassing twelve types of figures of speech ranging from personification to synecdoche. Celan’s use of figurative language is significantly influenced by the historical trauma of the Holocaust, in which language stands out as the medium of memory and silence. Each figure of speech contributes not merely as a stylistic convention, but as a vehicle through which historical experience and collective trauma are articulated.

Personification accounts for 10% of the figurative expressions identified in Celan’s poems and is used to animate abstract elements associated with death and suffering. In “*Schwarze Flocken*,” abstract elements such as ash and snow are endowed with human-like agency, functioning metaphorically as witnesses to genocide. This animation of the environment underscores the omnipresence of death during the Holocaust, where even natural elements such as ash and snow appear to participate in the reality of destruction.

Metaphor emerges as the most prominent figurative device in Celan’s work, accounting for 25% of the total instances identified. It serves as an indirect mode of expressing the experiences of a traumatised speaker. The most striking manifestation of the metaphorical way of speaking occurs in “*Todesfuge*” through the metaphor “*Schwarze Milch der Frühe*” (black milk of dawn). The word “milk,” traditionally associated with nourishment and life, is inverted to signify death. This metaphor reflects the psychological imprisonment and suffering of Holocaust victims, while also demonstrating the inadequacy of direct expression in conveying traumatised memory in a post-Auschwitz world.

Symbols likewise constitute 25% of Celan’s figurative language and are strongly linked to the historical and communal memory rather than individual emotional experience. Recurring symbols such as ashes, smoke, graves, and death function as concrete representations of genocide. In “*Todesfuge*,” the skyward-rising smoke symbolises the crematoria and the mass extermination of Jewish people. These symbolic representations firmly anchor Celan’s works, suggesting that his poetic expression is rooted in the historical experience of war-torn Europe and its communal memories, and not purely personal reflection.

Other figurative devices, such as hyperbole (15%), understatement (10%), simile (5%), irony (5%), and synecdoche (5%), further intensify the emotional tension within Celan’s poems. Hyperbolic images depict the immense scale of suffering, while understatement offers a voice to the

silenced experiences of trauma survivors. Together, these techniques create a poetic language that exists between expression and silence, memory, and trauma.

In contrast, an analysis of three poems by Usman Awang – “*Damai*,” “*Tanahair*,” and “*Pahlawan Kemerdekaan*” – identifies twenty examples of figurative language shaped by anti-colonial struggle, nationalism, and post-war formation of identity in Malaya. Unlike Celan’s trauma-soaked mourning, Usman Awang’s figurative language projects optimism, unity, and patriotic spirit. In his poetry, personification emerges as the dominant device, accounting for 25% of the total instances (five examples). Natural elements such as *tanah air*, *bumi*, and *langit* are endowed with human qualities. In “*Tanahair*,” the land is depicted as feeling, struggling, and labouring alongside its people. Such personification strengthens the emotional rapport between the people and their homeland, making the nation a living entity joining in the fight for freedom. Through this device, nationalism becomes a shared emotional experience, rather than a purely abstract ideal.

Metaphor appears less frequently in Usman Awang’s poetry (10%, two examples), yet it carries a significant ideological load. The nation is often conceptualised as a body that rises or awakens, symbolising the rebirth of national consciousness during the independence movement. These metaphors emphasise collective strength and social cohesion, reflecting the hopeful trend in resistance. Symbolism accounts for 15% of the figurative expressions identified and centres on images of independence, such as heroes, land, and sacrifice. In “*Pahlawan Kemerdekaan*,” the fallen warrior represents more than personal valour; he embodied the communal price of freedom. These symbols are filled with an ideological function to reinforce national identity and instil patriotic values during Malaya’s struggle for independence in the 1940s and 1957.

Other figurative devices, including hyperbole (20%), apostrophe (10%), metonymy (5%), synecdoche (5%), and paradox (5%), add to the emotional and rhetorical intensity of Usman’s poetry. Hyperbolic praise magnifies heroic sacrifice, while apostrophe allows for direct emotional appeals to the homeland and to fallen heroes. Taken together, these devices elevate the tone of struggle into a moral and national commitment.

Overall, this comparative analysis demonstrates that while both Celan and Usman Awang employ a wide range of figurative language, their usage actually diverges in meaningful ways. Celan’s figurative expressions are predominantly trauma-centred and retrospective, anchored in the event of

the Holocaust. In contrast, Usman Awang's figurative language is nation-centred and forward-looking, rooted in optimism, resistance, and the forging of national identity. This contrast underscores that figurative language is not merely a stylistic choice; rather, it is deeply shaped by the historical, political, and emotional realities surrounding each poet's work.

Table 1 The frequency of figurative language in German and Malay poems.

Types of Figurative Language	German Poems by Paul Celan				Malay Poems by Usman Awang			
	Schwarze Flocken	Todesfuge	Psalm	Total	Damai	Tanahair	Pahlawan Kemerdekaan	Total
Personification	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 -	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	5 (25%)
Metaphor	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	5 (25%)	1 (5%)	0 -	1 (5%)	2 (10%)
Irony	0 -	1 (5%)	0 -	1 (5%)	0 -	0 -	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
Symbol	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	5 (25%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)
Simile	1 (5%)	0 -	0 -	1 (5%)	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -
Apostrophe	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 -	2 (10%)
Allegory	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -
Metonymy	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
Hyperbole	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	4 (20%)
Understatement	1 (5%)	0 -	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -
Synecdoche	0 -	0 -	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 -	0 -	1 (5%)
Paradox	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	0 -	1 (5%)	0 -	1 (5%)
Total	7 (35%)	8 (40%)	5 (25%)	20 (100%)	7 (35%)	6 (30%)	7 (35%)	20 (100%)

Table 1 indicates that, among the twelve types of figurative language identified, only eight types occur in the German poems, while nine types are found in the Malay poems. The German poems show a stronger reliance on metaphor and symbolism, whereas the Malay poems have a higher frequency of personification.

Table 2 Figurative languages in German poems.

Poem	Excerpt	English translation	Figurative Language	Explanation
Todesfuge	“ <i>Schwarze Milch der Frühe</i> ” (stanza 1, line 1)	“Black milk of dawn”	Metaphor	The author is trying to picture the darkness and horror of the Holocaust.
Schwarze Flocken	“ <i>Jaakobs himmlisches Blut</i> ” (stanza 2, line 6)	“Jacob’s heavenly blood”	Metaphor	It is referring a person to something with religious connotations.
Todesfuge	“ <i>er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland</i> ” (stanza 7, line 33)	“he plays with his snakes and dreams a dream Death is a German-born master”	Symbol	The snakes symbolise the sinister forces at play during the Holocaust, such as the Nazi regime and its atrocities.
Psalm	“ <i>niemand bespricht unsern Staub</i> ” (stanza 1, line 2)	“nobody speaks of our dust”	Symbol	Dust symbolises the death that happened in the holocaust and how no one has spoken about it.

This study found that German poems rely on metaphor and symbolism, as shown in Table 2, as these forms of figurative language help shape a tone of sadness and articulate the historical trauma of the Holocaust and World War II, which encompass loss and the struggle of the Jews under Nazi control. Through the use of figurative language, the poet is able to convey traumatic experiences and provide readers with a deeper understanding of the historical context and the magnitude of suffering during this dark period.

In contrast, Malay patriotic poems rely more strongly on personification and hyperbole, as shown in Table 3, allowing readers to connect with the strong emotion of fighting for independence.

The results further indicate that both poets share similarities in their use of figurative language to address themes of sacrifice and the pursuit

Table 3 Examples of figurative language in Malay poems.

Poem	Excerpt	English Translation	Figurative Language	Explanation
Damai	<i>“Di mana benua yang mencintainya”</i> (stanza 1, line 1)	“Where is the continent that loves her”	Personification	The author gave human-like qualities such as loving to a continent.
Tanah Air	<i>“Bukankah dengan kasih dan harapan, Kau tenggelamkan mereka dalam dakapan”</i> (stanza 5, line 15)	“is it not with love and hope, You drown them in embrace”	Personification	The author is giving a human-like characteristic which is drowning to something that is not alive which is love and hope.
Pahlawan Kemerdekaan	<i>“namamu terukir di jantung rakyat”</i> (stanza 4, line 21)	“your name is engraved in the heart of the people”	Hyperbole	It exaggerates the idea of the hero’s significance by suggesting that their name is permanently etched or engraved in the hearts of the people, emphasizing the lasting impact and profound admiration they hold for the hero.
Damai	<i>“Ah, betapa indahnya bulan berkembang”</i> (stanza 3, line 17)	“Oh, how beautiful the moon blossoms”		Exaggerating the beauty of the moon blossoming.

of peace. This shared use enhances the emotional impact of their poems, allowing readers to have a greater emotional attachment to the historical events depicted. For example, in portraying acts of heroism and sacrifice, both poets employ vivid metaphors, similes, and personification. These figurative devices not only enrich the aesthetic quality of the poems but also evoke strong emotional responses from readers. Through such figurative expressions, the poets are able to express complicated emotions and sentiments, making the characters within their poems more relatable. Additionally, the use of figurative language serves as a bridge between the past and the contemporary, enabling readers to empathise with the tribulations and victories of those who preceded them. By employing metaphorical and symbolic language in their texts, both poets encourage reflection on the meaning of peace, demonstrating how figurative language reinforces poetry's capacity to represent and preserve human experience across different historical periods and cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of patriotic poems by Paul Celan and Usman Awang demonstrates the use of different forms of figurative language, reflecting the poets' distinct stylistic approaches. Paul Celan's poems contain a total of twenty instances of figurative language. In "*Schwarze Flocken*," "*Todesfuge*," and "*Psalm*," he uses two personifications, five metaphors, one irony, five symbols, one simile, three hyperboles, two understatement, and one synecdoche. In contrast, the Malay poems composed by Usman Awang twenty instances of figurative language, including five personifications, two metaphors, one irony, three symbols, two apostrophes, one metonymy, four hyperboles, one synecdoche, and one paradox.

The results indicate that metaphor and symbolism are the most frequently used forms of figurative language in Paul Celan's poetry. The poet employs metaphor to express complex emotions arising from the trauma of the Holocaust, portraying - pain, loss, and trauma Jewish people went through. In "*Todesfuge*," for example, the metaphor "*Schwarze Milch der Frühe*" ("black milk of dawn") conveys the unnatural horror and psychological rupture endured by Jews during the Holocaust. Celan's use of symbols such as ashes, dust, and references to *graves*, reflects the socio-political context of Nazi Germany, the mass extermination of Jewish communities, and the enduring trauma of genocide. These figurative choices not only intensify the emotional atmosphere of his poems but also serve as testimonial expressions that preserve the memory of historical violence. Symbolism, in particular, allows Celan's poetry to operate on multiple interpretive levels, inviting

readers to engage with both the historical and emotional dimensions of his work.

An analysis of Usman Awang's poems "*Damai*," "*Tanahair*," and "*Pahlawan Kemerdekaan*" shows that personification is the most prominent poetic device. This is evident in expressions such as "*Tanahair memanggil anaknya pulang*" (The motherland calls her children home) and "*Namamu terpahat di hati rakyat*" (Your name is engraved in the heart of the people), in which the nation and national heroes are personified to draw attention to the struggle for national freedom. The geopolitical realities of colonialism in Malaya and struggles against imperialist nation-states form the backdrop against which such figurative language can be seen to be used as instruments of resistance and national unity. Usman Awang's use of hyperbole, as seen in "*namamu terpahat di hati rakyat*," further emphasises the struggles and sacrifices of national heroes.

The findings also reveal that both poets employ figurative language to depict sacrifice and the pursuit of peace. In both cases, figurative language enhances the emotional impact of the poems and enables readers to engage more deeply with the historical experiences represented. In Celan's poetry, figurative language serves as a vehicle for expressing grief, anger, and trauma rooted in the persecution of the Jewish people. In contrast, Usman Awang's poetry uses figurative language to articulate the nation's struggle for independence and to evoke patriotism and love for the homeland. Whether in one case or the other, figurative language brings readers emotionally closer to history, facilitating a deeper understanding of the events and experiences portrayed.

From an academic perspective, this study offers several implications for Malay literary studies. First, it demonstrates that comparative literary analysis across cultures enhances understanding of how figurative language functions within different historical and ideological settings. Second, the findings suggest that Malay poetry, particularly the works of Usman Awang, plays a significant role in shaping national identity, preserving collective memory, and transmitting nationalist ideals through aesthetic and emotional means. Finally, by comparing Malay patriotic poetry and German Holocaust poetry, this study broadens the scope of Malay literary studies by situating it within of trauma, nationalism, and poetic expression, thereby contributing to a more inclusive understanding of world literature.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Izzatul Elisya Rosli: Original draft, data collection, and data analysis; Farhana Muslim Mohd Jalis: Supervision, reviewing, data analysing and draft editing.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

DECLARATION

Conflict of interest: The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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